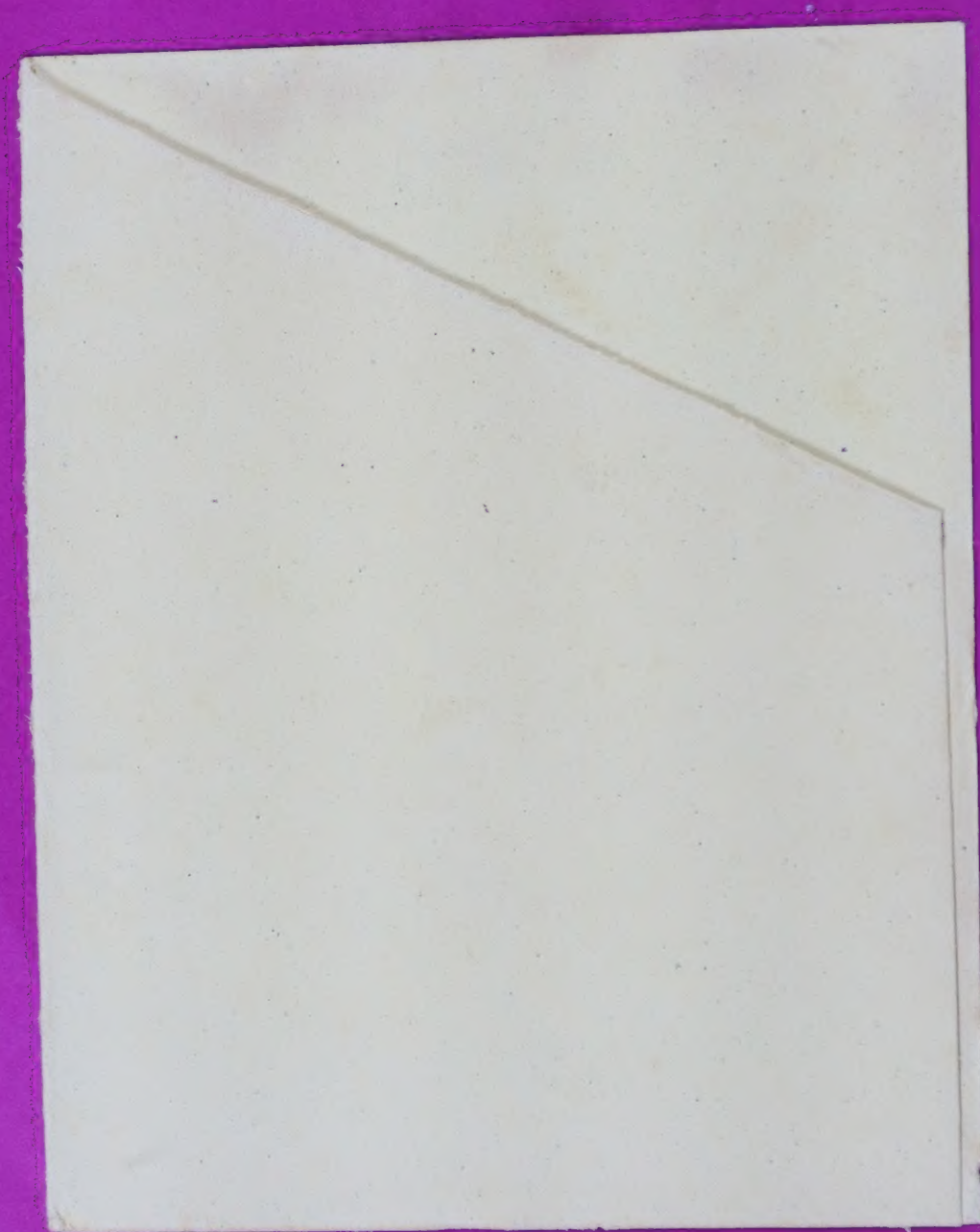




451





## APOCRYPHA, DEMOTED AND RETRIEVED

S. Hemraj

### 1. Summary

The Apocrypha are those writings which can be apportioned in a Christian Bible edition as an apanage to the Old Testament or as an aperture to the New Testament. They offer profitable reading about God's on-going purpose at the last stage of the religious history of ancient Israel; yet they are to be kept "hidden away" before the splendour of the New Dispensation in Jesus Christ. In ecumenical fidelity to the one common Canon of inspired Scripture, these additional writings invite all Christians not to get entrenched in fixed traditions and exact delimitations of God's revealed Word. They widen also the horizon in the Church's dialogue with the modern world, where vast groups of fellow pilgrims do treasure wise Scriptures from the past and feel inspired by contemporary messages that build up the one brotherhood and are thus "seeds of the Word" or signs of God's loving self-communication.

### 2. Disturbing and disuniting

Interdenominational fellowship would have been easier without those disturbing apocryphal books. But, at the moment, uneasiness arises when sister-churches interchange their respective Bibles, for the number and order of books may or may not agree. It depends on his or her church-membership whether a person accepts more or less books. This situation is an unpleasant consequence of a mistaken approach. Instead of viewing Scripture as a gratuitous flow of living water that streams towards the recipient, it is regarded as a measurable rocky heap that faces the adherent as well as the dissident believers, according to the authoritative decision of their particular church-council.

But how could anyone dare to circumscribe the exact extent of Scripture from outside, as if seated in judgment above Scripture? It is only from within the life-stream of the one essential saving Word, that the believing community



can humbly grope for the presence of the Spirit in handed-on written words, especially at the periphery. Books can only be canonical if they are meaningfully connected with that one central Life-Rule or Canon. There is no monolythic Bible-Canon as such, since even materially speaking, the one Holy Bible Book, bound together as a single copy, is but an outgrowth of many centuries of Church-experience in living the Word and listening to His words.

When sharing the rich deposit of faith with different cultures in a multiplicity of languages, the Good News people cannot stick to the original Palestinian Judaeo-Hellenistic setting.<sup>1</sup> The guiding Life-Rule, received through various writings of the Synagogue and the early Ekklesia, has to be re-worded and translated in open colloquy with today's fast moving world.

### 3. Bible-editions with Apocrypha

The New Hindi Bible of the Bible Society of India in its larger interconfessional edition with Apocrypha (1980) is the first common venture of its kind, in an Indian language. It follows exactly the pattern of the English "Common Bible" (Ecumenical edition) and the Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha. It contains first *the undisputed canonical OT books*, taken directly from the Hebrew Bible, but counting and ordering them differently from the Jewish editions. These contain normally 24 books, arranged as 5 Torah-books+8 Nebiim (4 historical: Josh, Jdg, Sam, Kgs and 4 prophetic: Is, Jer, Ez, Minor)+11 Kethubim (3 didactic Ps, Job, Prov and 5 festal: Ruth, Songs, Eccl, Lam, Esth and 3 hagiographic: Dan, Ezr-Neh, Chron). The Bible Society Bibles contain normally the same books, but counted 39 in the following way: 5 Legal books+12 Historical books (Josh, Jdg, Ruth, 1 & 2 Sam, 1 & 2 Kgs, 1 & 2 Chron, Ezra, Neh, Esth)+5 Poetic books (Job, Ps,

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1. That is why the possibility was seen to preface the Lecti-  
onary with readings from "inspired" non-biblical Scriptures.  
Prayer books have been prepared not only for inter-reli-  
gious dialogue sessions but for the edification of Christians  
as such.



Prov, Eccl, Songs) + 17 Prophetic books (Is, Jer, Lam, Ez, Dan, the Twelve). This re-arrangement of books is definitely due to the Hellenistic usage, as we find in the main codices of the Septuagint Greek OT.<sup>2</sup> Legal Books + Historical Books (Josh, Jdg, Ruth, Sam, Kgs, Chron, Ezra-Neh, Esth, Jud, Tob, Macc) + Poetic books (Ps, Odes, Prov, Eccl, Songs, Job, Wisd, Sir, Sol) + Prophetic books (Twelve, Is, Jer, Bar, Lam, Ez, Dan). Hence, in the first section of our "Common Bibles" we have all the books of the Hebrew Bible editions, but more or less arranged in the order of the Greek OT, after removing a number of books found in the main uncial manuscripts of the Greek Bibles. This reveals already a fluctuating position. There is nothing sacrosanct about the way biblical books are counted and arranged. All Christians can simply accept an OT Bible edition, in which the books of the Hebrew Bible are all included without exception, though counted differently and arranged more or less according to the Greek Bible.

About *the* NT there does not seem to be any problem. All Christians do accept the 4 Gospels + 1 Acts + 21 Epistles + 1 Apocalypse, though the inclusion of the very last books (Jude, Rev) and the exclusion of some Apostolic books (Didache, Clem., Ap. Const., Shep.) cannot simply be taken for granted. Even here there cannot be any rigid position. The problem of the ending of Mark (at 16:8 or 16:20) and the placing of John 7:53; 8:11, for instance, show a certain elasticity. Through the NT, moreover, some passages quoted as Scripture, are brought in from the Greek Bible beyond the traditional Hebrew books and even from outside the traditional Greek uncial manuscripts (Jude 15, for instance being a quotation from Enoch 1:9). We cannot just be dogmatic about clear-cut areas for the gift of NT inspiration as such. Yet, on the whole, all Christians can fully agree to a Bible,

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2. RSV: *The Apocrypha of the OT*, T. Nelson & Sons, New York, 1957, follows A. RAHLF's edition (Stuttgart, 1935), based mainly on Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus. For the additions to Daniel the Greek version of Theodotion was followed; for 2 Esdras the Old Latin Version.



containing the Hebrew Bible books together with the NT as it is. What more?

Though Bible Society Bibles usually refrain from publishing additional books to those 66 universally accepted as part of the OT and NT, yet there is an increasing demand for those extra books which for centuries have appeared as "*Apocrypha*" before or sometimes after the NT series of books. Some of those apocryphal books have even been interspersed within the OT as "deuterocanonical"<sup>3</sup> books and some of them have been omitted or placed in an appendix. The Hindi Apocrypha follow the order of the Common Bible, by giving first the 12 "major apocryphal writings" (those otherwise called "deuterocanonical") namely<sup>4</sup> Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, 1 & 2 Maccabees, and the 3 remaining ones: 1 & 2 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh. The publisher accommodates the books according to the wish of the readers, either keeping them separate or joining

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3. The term "deuterocanonical" has been used first only by Sixtus of Siena in 1566, in the sense of "later added to the Canon" but not as "secondary Canon"!

4. B. METZGER, (*An Introd. to the Apocr.*, Oxford U.P., New York, 1957, P.IX) recommends the reading of Tobit first, though the usual English order places 1 & 2 Esdras in the very beginning. The German edition starts with Judith. The French ecumenical version T.O.B. (Traduction Oecumenique de la Bible, Ed. Integrae, 1975) begins with a complete Greek Esther. It leaves out 1 & 2 Esdras, Man. The additions to Daniel (Song of the Three, Susanna, Bel & the Dragon) surprisingly, have been entered within the canonical Daniel, though with different lettertype. Another novel feature of this edition is that the OT books appear in the Hebrew order! The Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha starts also with Tobit.



them to the NT or in between the OT and NT.<sup>5</sup> In any case, we obtain thus a third set of Biblical books, whose canonical status is not indicated. We can draw a parallel with the Tri-pitika of the Pali Buddhist Canon, which names the third section "abhi-dharma pitika" i.e. the section of additional doctrine. The Apocrypha appear as "abhi-dharma-sastra" of the biblical "dharma-sastra".

#### 4. Nomenclature

The name "Apocrypha" has been kept, however. In the singular "apocryphon" could mean a writing which is "kept hidden", either because it is reserved as a secret mysterious instruction for the initiated, or because it is put away from the general public as a spurious sectarian doctrine. But words which are quite derogatory in the singular acquire sometimes a different meaning in the plural. Even "Bible" comes from such a plural "Biblia", meaning *The great Book*, whereas "biblion" is just any small booklet! Therefore, no one should really have any difficulty with the name "Apocrypha" for the third section of the Bible. Everyone can agree to this definition of the Apocrypha, given in the Preface to the RSV edition of "The Apocrypha of the O.T." (1957):

The Apocrypha here translated are those books and not in the Hebrew Bible. With the exception of 2 Esdras these books appear in the Greek version of the OT portions of books which appear in the Latin Vulgate, either as part of the OT or as an appendix, but are which is known as the Septuagint, but they are not included in the Hebrew Canon of Holy Scripture.

The Apocrypha themselves contain a very flattering reference to the additional writings, though being considered esoteric they are not to be made public:

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5. According to the Agreement between the World Catholic Federation of Bible Apostolate and the United Bible Societies: Directives for interconfessional cooperation, 1968. J.M. ROSS: the status of the Apocrypha, *Theology* (Spck, London) 82 (1979) 183-191



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Make public the 24 books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the 70 that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge. (2 Esdras 14:45-46).

## 5. How the Apocrypha fared in history

Many shepherds, however, have deemed their Christian flock to be "wise" enough in Christ, and thus *promoted* the use of several non-Hebrew-canon books, so much that "The wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach" came to be known as "Ecclesiasticus" or "The Church Book" for the instruction of the neophytes. The indiscriminate use of all literature that appeared clothed in biblical language extended even beyond the classical 12 or 15 Apocrypha, so that Christian inspiration was drawn from books rather called "Pseudepigrapha", like Enoch, Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, 3 & 4 Maccabees.<sup>6</sup> But at one time some "unwise" shepherds started drawing doctrinal justifications, from apocryphal "Scripture Quotations" in order to boost lucrative devotions. The Reformation brought a godly corrective by basing itself on the central canon again. It was but natural that those books were pushed out which seemed to be the source of flagrant malpractice within the holy Church. To *demote* the Apocrypha the reformers could rely on the firm authority of the great Jerome and the whole Jewish tradition if not also partly on sound Church tradition.

Jerome<sup>7</sup> was essentially a translator, and thus he was bound to take a position vis-a-vis the original language. Accord-

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6. See R.H. CHARLES: *The Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha of the O.T.* 2 Vols., Oxford, 1913; H.B. SWETE: *An Introduction to the O.T. in Greek*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1902 (1900 with the Oxford Ed. of the O.T. in Greek); L. BRENTON: *The Septuagint Version of the O.T. and Apocrypha*, S. Bagster & Sons, reprint 1976; R. METZGER, ed. *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1965.

7. See LUDWIG SCHADE, *Die Inspirationslehre des h. Hieronymus*. Bibl. Stud. 15, Herdersche Verl., Freiburg, 1910.



HEALTHY GLOBE the practice of the Latin Church he always used the wider Block Scripture. First, he thought that also the Septuagint translation was truly inspired (Preface to Chronicles). Then he stuck to the "veritas Hebraica", and would only attribute the Spirit's guidance to the LXX-additions. In his "Prologus Galeatus" of 391 he counted only 22 O.T. books (placing Ruth with Judg., and Lam with Jer) and struck out all other books of the LXX as Apocrypha. In his 112th Letter to Augustine of the year 404 he shows no respect any more for the LXX. He calls the Apocrypha simply non-canonical, as not being "scripturae ecclesiasticae". Still, as a translator, Jerome could not avoid using the LXX-Greek to solve enigmatic obscurities and lacunae in the received text. He made rather a hurried latin translation of those Apocrypha, which caused him but bad humour!

In 1534 *Luther's* German translation contained the Apocrypha separately, in between the two Testaments, as non-doctrinal books (leaving out 1&2 Esdras). In 1535 Coverdale's English version had a similar arrangement (leaving out Baruch and the Prayer of Manasseh). Yet in 1546 a few, not well-informed (a look into a Qumran Cave would have made them more prudent!) council-fathers at *Trent* voted in favour of the Decree on the Canon of Scripture, including the Apocrypha minus 1&2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh,<sup>8</sup> inspite of the well-known contrary opinion of Origen and church-fathers like Gregory of Nazianze, Athanasius, not to mention Jerome.

## 6. Making the best of an untimely decision

An honest Bible scholar cannot just ignore this official pronouncement, repeated even by the II Vatican Council. Though he feels uneasy about this "ecumenical blunder", he cannot simply brush it aside as a devilish mistake. He has to respect the "sensus fidei" of a majority of Christians, though he can and must interpret the hierarchic declaration according to historical context and sound exegetical method.

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8. In later editions of the official Latin Vulgate the 3 non-deuterocanonical Apocrypha were still kept in the Appendix "lest they altogether perish."



The minimum value of the declaration seems to be that the Apocrypha have been accepted as books which are *in relationship* to the proto-canonical books, that they belong to the set of written scriptural books used by the early Church. Nothing is said about their doctrinal content (in fact, biblical texts are never meant to provide "doctrine" apart from the living faith of the maturing community). The primacy of the one authoritative Canon, the Rule of Life in Christ, flowing from the very apostolic period, stands intact. The Apocrypha, accepted as "inspired" Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church since Trent, are still to be read *in as far* as they are co-expressive of God's revealed purpose in the pre-new-testamental period and always *in the light of* the one canonical Life-Rule, present in the Church under the direct inspirational guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

A clue to a "catholic" (though borderline!) view on the Apocrypha comes perhaps from this "protestant" guideline, given a few years before Trent's solemn anemathising position, in "De Canonicis Scripturis Libellus" by A. Bodenstein (Carlstadt) in 1520: "Read those controverted books, *provided* that you have the set purpose of collating them and comparing them with the canonical books". We could say the Church needed the Apocrypha as a gift from God, in as far as they were necessary to gain a complete picture of his pre-new-testamental self-revelation. It is an undeniable fact of history that the primitive Church needed and used the Greek O.T. translation "with Apocrypha" in order to receive and transmit the Hebrew Canon as such. This need was but clearly formulated at Trent. The Church still needs the Apocrypha in order to more fully and meaningfully transmit and

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9. Even the N.T. has to be read with this "Canon" in mind, cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16: "So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures."



even translate the original O.T. Scripture, though they remain somehow "hidden" in as far as they immediately precede and more urgently call for the royal splendour of the N.T. Scripture. Hence, the "catholic" position about the additional books, called Deuterocanonicals or Apocrypha, is but an explicitation of what all Christians believe about the "Bible". What Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and some other Christian Churches mean when accepting the Apocrypha equally as "Scripture", is therefore, an assurance in faith about what even those Christians feel, who say they do *not* accept the Apocrypha as "Scripture"! Let us read the introduction of the larger edition of the Good News Bible (1978):

Among Christians who do not accept these books as Scripture there is, however, *widespread agreement* as to their importance in providing much valuable information on Jewish history, life, thought, worship, and religious practice during the centuries immediately prior to the time of Christ. Accordingly, they make possible a clearer understanding of the historical and cultural situation in which Jesus lived and taught.<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Acceptable to all?

Since the Apocrypha were certainly included in the initial process of transmitting the message—as if carried along by the main current—, nobody can really object to their presence at the side of both Testaments. They are an appropriate link; they are important witnesses to God's on-going plan of salvation. Yet, it can be conceded that they are of less importance, if compared with the O.T. prophetic literature. The closer to the Gospel, the less important the O.T. becomes. It fades away into the peripheral Apocrypha. One should not just equate the words Canon, Inspiration, Scripture, Biblical Authority...and apply them uniformly to all books.

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10. B.METZGER (*op. cit.*, p.VIII) voices the same view: "The author does not regard the Apocryphal books as part of the Bible; at the same time, he is convinced that they contain certain moral and religious insights of permanent value. This body of literature also supplies important information regarding the life and thought of the Jewish



The battling atmosphere of Reformation and Counter-Reformation is a sad chapter of the past. A conservative adherence to the heated disputations of those days is harmful today. The fundamentalist position cripples the common witness before today's world, which eagerly longs for the one Canon of Truth. According to the fundamentalist, "the canon is the precise and absolute boundary of divine inspiration. Every word that falls within the canonical books is divinely inspired, but no word that falls within non-canonical books is inspired".<sup>11</sup>

Though it is difficult to overcome emotional convictions, both Catholics and Protestants should try to reconsider the tradition of the "Canon" from a non-fundamentalist viewpoint. S.P. Kealy, making his own the impassionate open attitude of the Ethiopian Church towards the Canon, sees even a possibility of "revising" the Catholic Canon, defined by Trent. There was no initial "closed" Canon. "Perhaps a Canon is best understood as a standard or a measure against which the doctrinal content (and perhaps inspiration also) of other books is to be measured".<sup>12</sup> From textual research it appears that there was no definite Jewish Palestinian Canon, no definite Alexandrian Greek Canon, no definite Christian Canon! C. Vermes attests about the Dead Sea Scrolls:

The whole of the Hebrew O.T. (except Esther) is attested at Qumran; but this does not mean that the Essene canon was identical with that of traditional Judaism...We cannot assert that some of the Apocrypha were not treated by the Essenes as an integral part of Scrip-

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people during a significant period of their history, namely the period just prior to the emergence of Christianity. By becoming acquainted with these books, therefore, one will be better able to understand the political, cultural, ethical, and religious background of the contemporaries of Jesus Christ."

11. JAMES BARR, *Fundamentalism*, SCM, London 1977, p. 79.

12. SEAN P. KEALY, "The Canon: An African Contribution," *Bibl. Theol. Bull.* 9 (1979) no. 1, p. 24.



ture. After all, the Book of Ecclesiasticus of Ben Sira was found in Caves 2 and 11 (and at Masada), five copies of Tobit have surfaced from Cave 4 (four in Aramaic and one in Hebrew) and a small Greek fragment of the Letter of Jeremiah has been identified among the contents of Cave 7.<sup>13</sup>

The Introduction to the Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha in the Good News Bible acknowledges with all objectivity:

Precisely when Jewish leadership officially adopted the traditional 39 books of the so-called "Hebrew Canon" is not known; nor is there agreement as to exactly what criteria were used in determining the canon. According to tradition the determination of the books of the Hebrew canon was made about A.D. 90, but there is evidence to believe that official and widespread agreement on this issue came somewhat later. Among Christians it was apparently only in the fourth century that the issue of canonicity of these books (the Apocrypha) arose, a situation which is reflected in Jerome's placing these books in a separated section in his Vulgate translation of the O.T.

## 8. New Ropes

Many burning issues acquire less stinging stringency when they are looked at within true perspective. For instance, the question of papal infallibility cannot be separated from the consensus of the whole Church, nor from collegiate episcopal responsibility. In the common search for more perspicacity in the biblical legacy there has to be integral honesty and the readiness to forego cherished devotional outgrowths or at least reduce their importance if deeper fellowship in real matters of faith-commitment is to be attained.

For instance, it is more natural to understand the Greek "adelphos", especially in connection with the feminine "adelphè", as natural brother—and thus acknowledge the likelihood, from Scripture alone, from the very first "tradition"

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13. G. VERMES, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Collins, London 1977, p. 202.

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therefore, that Jesus had his own brothers and sisters.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this question is not raised to show any disrespect for cherished devotions; but it calls for mutual understanding and the humility not to inflate pious opinions into sky-scraping walls of division. May be, the exact definition of the canonical status of the Apocrypha is an uncalled for, still debatable problem, which should not loom at the horizon of each ecumenical dialogue. Brothers and sisters can be united in the Lord without scrutinizing the number of pages contained in or after the O.T.!

The Spirit is moving the different Churches to agree on at least one version acceptable to all. First, it was thought necessary to have a "Catholic Edition of the RSV", prepared for the use of Catholics—since "consideration of Catholic tradition favoured a particular rendering or the inclusion of a passage omitted". In 1965 the Oxford Annotated RSV with Apocrypha received Catholic "Imprimatur" *without* changes in the Biblical texts. Similarly the RSV-Common Bible, Ecumenical edition with Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books, in 1973. The New English Bible appeared also with Apocrypha and was used gratefully also by Roman Catholics. Finally, the Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha was published by the American Bible Society, with the "Imprimatur" of the Archbishop of Hartford (15 May 1978).<sup>15</sup>

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14. See JEAN GILLES, *Les 'Freres' et 'Soeurs' de Jesus*, Coll. Questions Religieuses Aubier-Montaigne, 1979.

15. The GNB presents the 12 Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha (beginning with Tobit, ending with 2 Mac) after the O.T., pp.1-217. Then follow "Some additional books", with a different page-numbering, pp. 1-59. The introduction reads: "The following books: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, and the Prayer of Manasseh, are accepted by many Protestants... as part of the Apocrypha. 1 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh constituted a part of the Septuagint Greek text of the OT used by Christians during the early centuries of Christianity..." In the scriptural references of the footnotes, reference to apocryphal books have also been entered. Yet, the appendix of NT passages quoted or paraphrased from the Septuagint does not provide quotations from the Septuagint Apocrypha.







